

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

September 30, 2018

The reading from Mark picks up where we left off last Sunday. In last week's reading, the disciples were fighting over who was the greatest. Then, Jesus took a child into his arms and reminded the disciples that welcoming the powerless, the dependent, and the vulnerable is what makes someone great. Today, Jesus still held that child in his arms and the conversation continued.

Today's episode continued when John told Jesus that he silenced someone who acted in the spirit of Jesus's teachings but was not physically following Jesus. And Jesus responded something like this: "Hey now, that's not what we're doing here. If they're doing good things and releasing people from destruction and freeing them to love and serve, that's a good thing. Don't stop them. Now, do not put barriers in place for other who want join in our collective work. It is much better to lose a part of what you believe or be a little uncomfortable rather than give up the whole pursuit of transformation. Like salt remains salty, be pure in your intentions. And, if you're still confused but what I said, then just be at peace with one another."

Okay, so, Jesus said a lot, but the essence is that we should do everything we can to include all people in the work to care for the vulnerable, the dependent, and the

powerless. If we find something that's standing in the way of including others in that work, then we need to remove the barrier instead of letting the whole purpose get muddied. Does that make sense?

As much as you and I hate to admit it, we're a whole lot like John. We throw shade when someone doesn't participate in the church like we do. We criticize the person who fights homelessness by giving cash to the homeless, or we criticize the person who doesn't help in that way. We endorse racist systems by our inaction and avoidance of our nation's history. We're complacent when those with limited mobility and those who are gender non-conforming say they don't have access to our restrooms. We often blame the victim for speaking out at the wrong time or in the wrong way instead of confronting the injustice. You see, we've allowed stumbling blocks to pile up and prevent us from fully engaging in God's work.

Yet, our God is relentless in pursuit of what is good and just. Over these past two weeks, we've seen Jesus say the same thing in different ways to the disciples. First, he placed a child in their midst. Then, he spoke of a cup of water. Again, he talked of salt. Each time he used hyperbole and metaphor to communicate the essence of our faith, namely that our God includes all people in caring for the vulnerable, dependent, and powerless. And, that's not the end of it, for our God continues to come to us in this community of faith. Week after week we hear the stories of our faith tell us something similar about how we, as people of faith, can live out our faith. Our God

comes to us through the people in this congregation to remind us of our baptismal calling. And, our God comes to us through the gifts of this table and the waters of the font.

The Scriptures proclaim this truth. For, in Mark's gospel, people are confused by Jesus's identity. Jesus will teach and people will doubt. Jesus will heal and people will hurl false accusations. However, Jesus will reveal over and over again that true life looks like dying, and that eternal life means rejecting violence and pride, and that everlasting life is found in acts of service and love for all. So, no matter the barriers that we leave in place, no matter our unwillingness to open our eyes to God's good news, no matter how much we miss the mark on God's hope for us and for all creation, we have a God who will come back to us and remind us again. For, our faith is not static or complacent. Our faith is ever-changing, ever-growing, and God-inspired. Our God will stop at nothing to remind us that we are loved and that eternal life is found in removing the obstacles so that all might know that love.

As we gather in this place, we celebrate the ways that we have enacted God's vision by removing barriers to better share God's love and transformation. We give thanks for air conditioning that allows us to welcome our siblings with respiratory issues and health concerns during the heat of summer. We rejoice as we create clean energy with our solar panels to help transform communities with clean air. We boldly affirm our statements of inclusion for all people without exception. We tell victims of

sexual assault that it's not their fault and that we believe them. With these actions, we give thanks to our God who enlivens this work and who empowers us to take the next step as a community of faith.

Friends, the good news is that our God will stop at nothing to remind us that we are loved. Our God brings transformation by consistently widening the circle to welcome those who are different. So, as we gather around this table we too look for ways to expand our welcome, we look to bring new life to all creation, and we look to bring transformation to the world because we were first loved and transformed by our God. What a gift to share. Thanks be to God. Amen.